

NEEDLES AND PINS - AND ENTREPRENEURS

Dave Hill

I didn't realise that needles were made two at a time, with points at either end, the holes for the thread were then made and they were cut apart, making two needles. Given the technology and skill needle makers would diversify into medical needles, fishhooks and perforating pins.

I'm not sure that there weren't crude perforating machines about before Henry Archer invented perforating for postage stamps. It is said he watched someone pricking the imperforate stamp margins with a needle to make separation easier. He was no mechanic and had to employ one to make a successful machine but they realised that the only satisfactory way was to remove a line of tiny discs of paper. Even his mechanic could not produce a machine that could perforate all the stamps that were needed as postage stamps had become so popular.

So the Inland Revenue, who were responsible for providing the stamps to the Post Office, approached leading engineers David Napier & Sons who built and supplied perforating machines to them. The stamps were printed by Perkins Bacon but in 1870 the printing contract was given to De la Rue, soon they had to buy their own Napier perforating machines. In 1910 De la Rue lost the stamp contract to Harrisons.

This generation of Napiers had some successes with large aircraft engines in WWI but their foray into the luxury car market was a disaster which led to the eventual demise of the company, anyway they were no longer interested in perforating machines. Harrisons had never printed a stamp before but they had some good friends, the engineering firm of Grover & Co amongst them. They had been started by railway engineer John Grover (1836-1892) in 1862 and with good management and design staff could turn their hands to almost any engineering problem. They perfected the fast comb perforating machine, perforating 3 sides of a row of stamps at each stroke. They were fortunate to own a large premises in the East of London and received royalties from a number of inventions, the "Groverlock" spring dowel pin amongst them. Downsizing and the royalties kept

them going through the period when engineering was almost a dirty word. Mr A W Fenn who joined them between the wars and rose to be managing director guided them through this difficult period but when he came to retire in 2007 there was no one to carry on and the market had shrunk so the firm ceased to exist.

It was not necessary to be a genius to be successful. A good, saleable idea and dogged determination were all that were needed, and Joseph Sloper had these. His idea was to indelibly mark bills and cheques with “PAID” or “CANCELLED” to prevent them being paid twice. He decided the means to indelibly mark them was to perforate them, adapting the technology that had already been developed. A bonus was when the Post Office agreed **not** to buy back postage stamps that had been perforated with initials (Perfins) in 1868 and the basis of a business was established. A second generation continued it through boom years in the early 1900’s and another in the 1930’s. Other engineering work and the management of Bill Cockayne helped but the increased use of franking machines and Bill’s retirement led to them closing in 1993.

Needles had been made in London in the Middle ages, (hence Threadneedle Street), the needle makers moved to Bucks and finally Redditch. In the 19th century with a population of 5,000 Redditch was making 200 million needles a week exported throughout the world, providing 90% of the worlds' needles. If not a cottage industry at least it was a back yard one.



Henry Milward & Sons was typical of the many firms that had been making needles in Redditch for years. It was founded in the year of Henry’s birth, 1730, by his father. At one point they were the biggest producers of knitting and surgical needles, and fishing tackle in the world.

Milward’s were also benevolent employers, the fishing tackle was

added because one of the Milward's was an enthusiastic angler. Henry Milward & Sons used perfin pattern HM/&S H5170.02 from 1920 to 1924 and .03 from 1925 to 1932. Henry Wilkes also used H5170.03

1920 - 1924



H5170.02

1925 - 1932



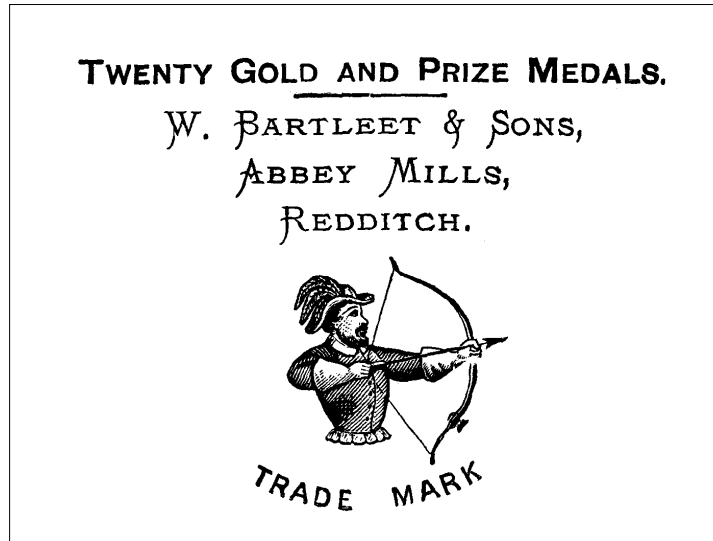
H5170.03

Another Redditch company was William Bartleet & Sons who were founded in 1750. Like Milward they manufactured a range of related products including needles, fish hooks and fishing tackle. In 1902 they were acquired by Milward but they continued to trade under their own name. Bartleet used perfin die W.B/&S - W0780.02 which was used up until 1921.

1895 - 1921



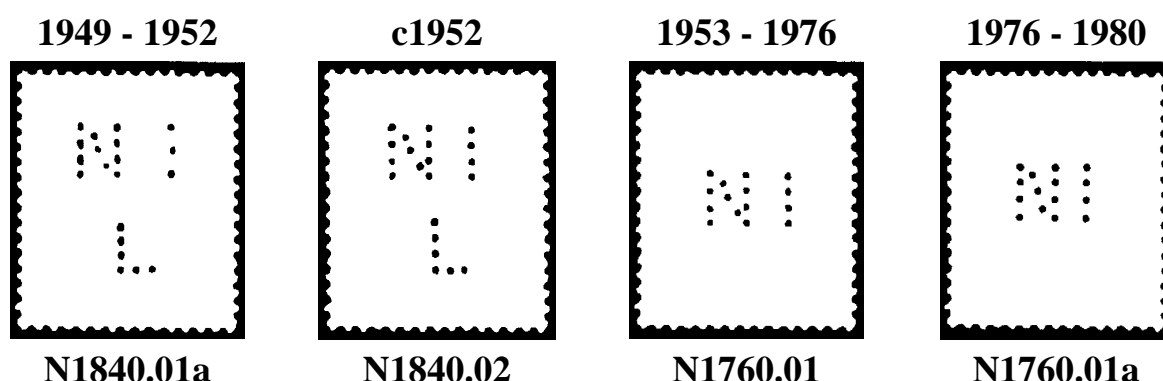
W0780.02



Henry Milward & Sons amalgamated with R. Turner & Sons and John James, a brand name that is still well known. Meanwhile other needle makers, William Hall and H. Wilkes amalgamated with others to form Amalgamated Needles & Fish Hooks. In 1932 all these joined together to form The English Needle & Fishing Tackle Co who eventually became ENTACO although before that they called themselves Needle Industries.

Many of the constituent firms still traded under their own, well-known brand names. In 1973 Coats Patons bought the company, trading as Needle Industries until a management buyout in 1990 when they reverted to the ENTACO name. They still use the John James brand name whilst Coats Patons retained the Milward name.

Obviously Sloper's did a lot of reciprocal business with needle makers. Whether it was this link with perfin machine makers or not, most of the needle manufacturers seemed to have been prolific users of perfins as will be seen below.



Needle Industries used perfin NI - N1760.01 from 1953-76 and N1760.01a from 1976-80. John James used perfin NI/L N1840.01a from 1945-52 and possibly N1840.02 c1952. There are a number of other NI/L dies listed in the catalogue all of which were probably used by Needle Industries but are still waiting information that might be able to confirm it.

W. Hall & Co, English Needle & Fishing Tackle Co Ltd used perfin EN/FT - E3230.01M between 1941-45. Whilst E3230.02 is known used by Henry Milward & Sons, English Needle & Fishing Tackle Co Ltd and by R. Turner & Sons. N1840.01 - 1945 - 1952

